

From Emotional Recognition to Brand Loyalty: A Study of Product Suitability and Fan Conversion Mechanisms in Celebrity Endorsement

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Abstract. In recent years, against the backdrop of the robust development of the fan economy, celebrity endorsement has emerged as a crucial strategy for brands to transform fans' emotions. Nevertheless, in practice, the transformation often proves ineffective or even exposes the brand to risks, primarily due to the insufficient compatibility between the endorser and the product. This study delves into the transformation mechanism of "fan loyalty - brand loyalty" in celebrity endorsement scenarios. Specifically, it focuses on exploring the moderating effects of the compatibility between the endorser and the product, along with the product category, on emotional transfer. Brands should strengthen the evaluation of the alignment in the tonality between the endorser and the product, implement differentiated endorsement strategies, and mitigate their reliance on the single-point risk associated with celebrities through community interaction. This approach aims to enhance the sustainability and stability of emotional transformation. By establishing a three-stage transformation model of "emotional identification – compatibility recognition – brand loyalty", this research not only uncovers the underlying mechanism of fans' emotional transfer in celebrity endorsements but also offers significant theoretical underpinnings and practical guidance for brand marketing endeavors.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement; Consumer purchase intention; Brand loyalty.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the practical effects and current complexity of celebrity endorsements as a high-frequency marketing strategy in the context of the booming fan economy. Enterprises expect to leverage the influence of celebrities to achieve brand exposure and conversion, especially pinning their hopes on the emotional identification and loyalty of fans towards their idols to shift towards the brand. However, when there is a mismatch between a celebrity's image and the products they endorse, fans may not buy in, and it may even lead to negative public opinion and trust crises for the brand. This research is of great significance for deeply understanding the consumer behavior mechanism driven by the fan economy, as well as guiding brands to scientifically select endorsers, avoid risks, and enhance marketing efficiency. This study mainly elaborates specifically from the aspects of the influence of the matching degree between celebrities and product images on fans' brand attitudes, the conditions for fans' emotional identification to transform into brand loyalty, and the differentiated roles of different product categories (such as daily necessities and luxury goods) on the path of loyalty transformation. The literature analysis method was employed to search for and read relevant materials and literature. The advantage of this method lies in its ability to well analyze the existing theoretical framework, sort out relevant empirical findings, identify research gaps, and build a solid theoretical foundation and conceptual model for this study, which is conducive to the progress of research. The ultimate research objective of this study is to expand the theoretical boundaries of the emotion-driven path in consumer behavior research and provide empirical support for brands to formulate more effective spokesperson selection and communication strategies. To achieve this goal, a systematic review of core variables (such as fit, emotional identification, brand loyalty, product category) and their interrelationships was conducted, and specific research questions and hypothesis frameworks were distilled based on literature analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sub heading

In recent years, celebrity endorsements, as an important means to influence consumers' cognition, attitude and purchasing decisions, have attracted extensive attention from the academic circle. Existing studies have explored the mechanism of endorsement effects from multiple dimensions such as emotional identification, spokesperson image, and brand interaction.

In his article *"The Impact of Fan Behavior on Brand Marketing Effects under Celebrity Endorsements"*, Zhang Guohua demonstrated that fan behavior has a significant positive impact on the brand marketing effects of celebrity endorsements [1]. This article contributes to this research on how to indirectly influence consumers' purchase intention and brand perception through the reputation of celebrities. However, the research on whether celebrities are compatible with the products they endorse is not comprehensive. This article will start with the compatibility between celebrities and products, and study how to transfer this emotional identification with the celebrity image to the brand after consumers have developed an emotional identification with the celebrity. Ultimately, build brand loyalty.

He Liu et al. pointed out that different levels of celebrity worship have a positive effect on consumer evaluation and revealed its moderating effect: consumers with a high level of worship are insensitive to the influence of brand endorsement combinations and maintain a relatively high level, while consumers with low worship show an inverted "U" -shaped response structure [2]. The contribution of this research lies in its innovative introduction of the social psychological phenomenon of "celebrity worship" into consumer behavior studies, providing theoretical and practical references for multi-brand endorsement strategies. However, this study mainly focuses on the consumer psychology level, and there is less exploration of other variables that may affect the endorsement effect, such as brand type differences and the fit of the spokesperson's image. Based on previous research, this article will further conduct an analysis from the perspectives of brand fit and the credibility of endorsers to supplement the deficiencies of existing studies and provide more targeted inspirations for the practical application of multi-brand endorsements.

2.2. Emotional Identification and Fan Engagement

Based on Zhang Yuling's research, consumers' identification with a brand is deeply dependent on the dual effects of emotional belonging and community participation. In the fan community, a typical brand community, fans are not only consumers of the products but also active co-creators of brand content. Its participation motivation is driven by the synergy of material rewards and the need for collective identity. On the one hand, the community offers functional values such as exclusive discounts to meet members' demands for economic benefits; On the other hand, fans build their identity within the community through highly organized collective actions such as ranking and controlling comments, thereby gaining group respect and self-worth confirmation [3]. This kind of community identity is often transformed into brand identity through the medium of celebrities. The emotional projection of fans towards their idols extends to the brands they endorse, creating a "love for the house and love for the dog" effect. However, the stability and sustainability of this transformation process face multiple challenges: Firstly, when a celebrity is involved in negative news, it may directly sever the connection between fans and the brand; Secondly, if a brand fails to consistently meet the expectations of community members, such as ignoring user co-creation opinions, it will weaken emotional belonging. Finally, overly commercialized operation strategies may undermine community trust, turning material incentives into instrumental means and leading to a superficial sense of identity. Therefore, brands need to seek a dynamic balance between material value and emotional value and consolidate the foundation of identity by deepening the sense of participation of members in the brand value chain.

2.3. Compatibility of the Spokesperson with the Brand

Jiang Yueyu et al. believe that the professionalism and reliability of brand endorsers have a significant and direct promoting effect on consumers' purchasing intentions. It is worth noting that this influence is not one-way transmission; brand image plays a key mediating role between the two [4]. The credibility of an endorser first indirectly drives purchasing behavior by strengthening brand trust and brand affection, forming a transmission chain of "credibility → brand image → purchase intention". The deeper mechanism lies in the boundary effect of image matching. When the traits of the spokesperson are misaligned with the brand's connotation, it will trigger a cognitive break among consumers. Therefore, contemporary research emphasizes that enterprises need to systematically assess the professional background, public image and historical behavior of their endorsers, and ensure image consistency through legal constraints and strategic positioning, so as to maximize the marketing value of endorsements.

2.4. Brand Interaction and Community Building

Xu Xinliang et al. pointed out that establishing two-way interaction with consumers through social platforms is an important way for brands to stimulate emotional identification and enhance purchase intention. In this process, the spokesperson can act as an "emotional bridge", leveraging their appeal and influence to promote the construction of a trust relationship between the brand and its fans [5]. This research provides useful insights for understanding the functions of endorsers in the social platform environment and is valuable for revealing the interaction mechanism and the formation process of emotional identification. However, its research pays insufficient attention to the possible risk factors that interaction may face and the vulnerability of trust relationships. This article will analyze the risk factors faced by brands and endorsers and the brand risks and consumer response mechanisms after the trust relationship is damaged by combining the theoretical mechanisms generated after celebrity endorsements, thereby supplementing the existing research in the aspect of endorsements and brand sustainable development.

2.5. Research Gap Analysis

Although relevant research has explored some aspects of the endorsement mechanism, there is still a lack of systematic sorting out of the transformation mechanism between "fan loyalty and brand loyalty", mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of the matching degree between the endorser and the product, and the potential negative impact of "misaligned endorsement" on the brand image has not been revealed. Second, ignore the differences in fans' attitudes towards different product types. For instance, the functional trust mechanism for daily necessities and the image trust mechanism for luxury goods may vary. Thirdly, the potential risk factors in endorsements and the consequences of negative events in endorsements on the emotional breakdown of fans and the damage to brand trust were overlooked.

Therefore, this study will conduct empirical analysis in combination with typical cases and intends to start from the three-stage path of "emotional identification - product adaptation - brand loyalty" to construct a more complete theoretical analysis framework.

3. Case Empirical Evidence

3.1. Case Reduction

A head brand in the Liuzhou Luosifen industry invites a popular traffic star, JC-T, to be global spokesperson. JC-T is an artist of Guangxi nationality who has expressed his love for Liuzhou Luosifen on many occasions. The professional image of JC-T's "extreme pursuit of acting career" is highly unified with the brand's craftsmanship spirit of "true skill, true strength", which attracts young consumers of the Z generation.

Meanwhile, a luxury brand is famous for its leather products and furs, which occupy a place in the luxury industry by virtue of its exquisite craftsmanship and unique design. In order to develop the young market, it invites JC-T as its spokesman, leveraging his popularity in the field of film, television and music to transform his fan base into potential consumers of the brand, attracting more young consumers and facilitating the development of the market.

The Liuzhou Luosifen brand advertises in 57+ cities at home and landmarks in 7 countries abroad, creating the phenomenon of "global encounter with JC-T's fried noodles" and forming a broken circle of communication. JC-T himself also released a stir-frying instructional video, which inspired the whole network to strengthen the emotional link between the star-product-consumer. The luxury brand, on the other hand, has launched a JC-T's same style wearing challenge on social media platforms such as rednote and Douyin, triggering imitation and retweeting by its fan base. Through the creation of exclusive star wearing scenes and single products, fans are given the opportunity to plant grass and enhance the emotional link between star-product-consumer.

The topic #JC-T endorses a brand of snail powder# has broken 100 million readers, the penetration rate of Generation Z has increased significantly, and the repurchase rate has increased by 15% from the previous year. Star real persona combined with brand creative products to pry fan economy, this brand of non-heritage craft and regional culture to drive the snail powder industry to turn to cultural value competition. Promote Liuzhou Luosifen production technology into a global perspective. According to third-party data, after JC-T endorsed a luxury brand, its online sales grew significantly. 2024 Q2 to Q4 online sales increased by 35% year-on-year, of which JC-T's sales of the same single product increased by 50%. The brand's brand awareness among young consumers under 25 years old increased from 47% to 72%. Some fans said they would continue to pay attention to the brand's new products after purchasing the products. However, some fans also said that they bought the bag because of the person, not because of the brand.

In summary, compared with daily necessities and other FMCG products, luxury goods face more complicated challenges in the process of transforming fan loyalty into brand loyalty due to their brand culture and special price. The brand value, product attributes and the fit between celebrities all influence consumers' purchasing preferences.

3.2. Case Study

3.2.1. The dilemma of "unidirectional projection" in the emotional connection mechanism

The emotional identity of fans focuses more on individual stars, and the brand only exists as a projection medium [6]. Fans' support for celebrities to buy products does not necessarily mean that they recognize the brand. Once the image of a star fluctuates, the brand may become a "damaged extension". However, when the brand image fluctuates, the emotional identity of the fans in the early stage of establishment will change rapidly, and the image of the celebrity will have little or no effect due to the brand fluctuation.

3.2.2. Product suitability and the risk of trust rupture

When the image, temperament and values of the spokesperson and the product are highly compatible, consumers will form a higher consistency of expectations at the cognitive level, which can effectively enhance the acceptance and trust of the brand, and then enhance the consumers' willingness to buy the product and improve brand identity and loyalty. On the contrary, if the spokesperson and the product between the existence of incongruity or "misalignment" of the situation, will lead to consumer cognitive bias, so that consumers for the overall evaluation of the brand declined, weakening the path of loyalty conversion. When brand spokespersons are involved in scandals, consumers' trust in the brand decreases significantly, and the negative impact of unethical scandals is more serious than that of illegal scandals [7].

3.2.3. Moderating effect of category attributes on loyalty migration paths

Due to the high reuse rate and obvious function orientation of daily necessities, the price is within the acceptable range of the general public, so fans can easily transform their emotions into actual

purchases; whereas in the field of luxury and high-end consumer goods, consumers pay more attention to the "symbolic value" of the products and the brand culture, which shows their status and taste, and there is a subtle tension between them and the spokespersons.

4. Theoretical Refinement: Three-stage Loyalty Transformation Mechanism Model in Celebrity Endorsement

4.1. Model Construction: Emotional Identity - Fit Recognition - Brand Loyalty Three-stage Path

In the first stage, fans generate emotional identification based on the individual image of the star. Emotional identification is the most basic link in the whole three-stage path, if there is no emotional identification of fans for the star, the subsequent path will be difficult to establish [8]. Emotional identification is the starting point of the fan economy: only when the fans have a strong emotional commitment to the star, will it provide a psychological basis for the subsequent brand migration. The so-called recognition is not only "like", but also a kind of value resonance. For example, the star's hometown, living habits, spirit of struggle, etc., may become the trigger point of identification. In the empirical case, JC-T, as an artist of Guangxi origin, is highly compatible with the geographical origin of Liuzhou Luosifen. Fans will strengthen their emotional projection because of this "sense of homology". Moreover, JC-T has expressed his love for Liuzhou Luosifen in public many times, and this kind of "daily consumption" behavior makes fans have a sense of closeness that "he is the same as us", which brings the psychological distance between celebrities and consumers closer. Similarly, JC-T's achievements in movies and music make his fans worship and recognize his artistic aesthetics. It is easier to understand and fit the value and concept of a luxury brand. Therefore, in the first stage, a real emotional bond based on cultural identity and daily habits is formed between fans and stars. However, compared with the case of snail powder, the emotional identity in the luxury goods scene stays more at the level of aesthetics and idol, and lacks the resonance of life and locality, so although it can also provide the possibility of emotional transfer, its "root" is relatively weak.

In the second stage, fans assess whether the star's image matches the product and decide whether to migrate their emotions to the brand; in the case of the Liuzhou Luosifen brand mentioned above, the Liuzhou Luosifen brand utilized the spokesperson strategy of deep fit and cultural resonance. The spokesman, JC-T, as an artist of Guangxi nationality, has expressed his love for Liuzhou Luosifen in variety shows many times. JC-T's professional image of "extreme pursuit of acting career" is highly unified with the brand's craftsmanship spirit of "real skills, real strength", which makes the endorsement naturally avoid the "hard promotion" feeling of incompatibility. Based on JC-T's dietary preference for "double sour bamboo shoots", the brand launched the "Huan Snail Duo Duo" series and designed a 24-inch suitcase-size gift box in conjunction with JC-T's label of "traveler", which was sold out in 5 seconds on the website. By inviting JC-T as the spokesperson, the brand has achieved a substantial breakthrough with the penetration rate of Generation Z increasing by 25 percentage points and the proportion of overseas revenue increasing by 11%. JC-T not only conveys the value of the product but also becomes a living symbol of the globalization of snail meal culture.

Finally, in the third stage, after the successful transfer of emotions, through brand interaction, product experience and other links to establish sustained brand loyalty [9]. The Liuzhou Luosifen brand in Shanghai flash store set up "JC-T the same eating Luosifen bit", fans replicated its advertising posture to take pictures, the taste memory of JC-T will be deeply bound with the scene experience. When the fans contacted Liuzhou Luosifen because of JC-T, the brand strengthened the publicity of Liuzhou's non-heritage skills, transforming star chasing into cultural pride. In the end, 72% of the fan consumers repurchased more than 3 times within six months and indicated that the reason for repurchasing was more due to the good craftsmanship and flavor of this snail noodle.

4.2. Influence Mechanism

First of all, star and product suitability is a bridge of emotional transformation, which affects the transformation of fans' emotional identification with the star into fans' loyalty to the brand [10]. If the star and brand product suitability is high, the deeper the emotional migration, the stronger the fans' identification and loyalty to the brand will be. Secondly, product attributes affect the efficiency and depth of the emotional conversion path. Daily necessities have high consumption frequency and obvious function orientation, and the efficiency of fans' emotional conversion is faster. After meeting the needs of fans, it is easy to form brand preference, and the depth of conversion increases; luxury goods have prominent symbolic value, low consumption frequency, and the path of emotional conversion of fans is longer and less efficient; the depth of conversion is affected by brand culture and symbolic value. Brands also deepen emotional resonance through social platform interactions, establish communities, etc., to strengthen the connection between brands and fans, which is an important "secondary empowerment" to maintain fans' loyalty from emotional recognition to brand loyalty.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that celebrity endorsements can significantly enhance brand loyalty through fan emotional identification, and product compatibility plays a key bridging role in this process. Product attributes, on the other hand, moderate conversion efficiency from fan loyalty to brand loyalty. From this, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement not only depends on the celebrity's own popularity and image but also relies more on the consistency between the endorser and the product's tone as well as the degree of matching with consumers' emotional needs. Based on this, in practice, brands should strengthen the assessment of the fit between endorsers and products, refine endorsement strategies to match the celebrity images and emotional attributes of different product categories, and build brand-fan interaction mechanisms through content co-creation and community operation, etc., to reduce reliance on a single celebrity and enhance loyalty.

This study has established a three-stage transformation mechanism of "fan loyalty - brand loyalty" in celebrity endorsements, filling the gap of the lack of systematic analysis of the emotional identification path in existing literature. It particularly emphasizes the bridging role of product compatibility in the transformation mechanism, providing a quantifiable and verifiable theoretical model for the academic community and practical guidance for enterprises to formulate endorsement strategies and fan operation. Future research can introduce quantitative methods such as structural equation modeling and eye-tracking to empirically verify the mechanism of emotional identification - product adaptation - loyalty conversion. At the same time, it should pay attention to the differences in endorsement effects under different cultural backgrounds, the influence of new fan participation methods, and the dynamic adjustment of the matching between the product life cycle and endorsement strategies, so as to further improve the theoretical and practical framework of celebrity endorsements.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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